



Zoom Bible Study ~ Improving Your Relationships

Session 8 ~ March 2, 2021

Maintaining a Strong Covenant Relationship

What could you do today or very soon to let one of those covenant people know how you feel about them?

Here are some suggestions:

- Tell them how glad you are God put them in your life.
- Reaffirm your commitment to them.
- Write a note expressing your appreciation for that covenant relationship.
- Do something special for a covenant relationship - unexpected for no reason at all, and just tell them again, "It's just because I love you."

Covenant relationships should have the highest priority in our lives. Ask God to help you appreciate more the covenant people in your life.

Contractual Relationships

The contractual relationships of your life are those which, though sometimes important, can indeed, be filled by someone else.

There are no absolute guidelines in defining these relationships, and these are coined terms not biblical ones. I have found it gives me a quick and helpful reminder of where my priorities should be focused.

Every relationship cannot have the highest priority. That would be impossible to live up to. It's also true that different covenant relationships have higher priorities at different times, depending on the circumstances.

Think of Jesus. He had twelve disciples, but it's obvious throughout the Gospels that three of them were closer to Jesus than the other nine. Who would those three be?

These three formed an inner circle who alone were permitted to witness such events as the raising of Jairus's daughter ([Mark 5:37](#); [Luke 8:51](#)), the Transfiguration ([Mark 9](#); [Matthew 17](#); [Luke 9](#)), and the agony of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane ([Mark 14:33](#); [Matthew 26:37](#)).

Do you think he loved them more than the others? Why would he be closer to them than the others?

Principles for our Contractual Relationships:

What Is Caesar's and What Is God's?

[Matthew 22:15-22](#):

Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. ¹⁶ They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. ¹⁷ Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?"

¹⁸ But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? ¹⁹ Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, ²⁰ and he asked them, "Whose image is this? And whose inscription?"

²¹ "Caesar's," they replied.

Then he said to them, "So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

²² When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

Our Responsibility to Those in Authority Over Us

If we think of those in authority over us as the "Caesars" in our lives, then we can apply this principle and it can give us some very good guidance on our behavior and responsibilities as employees or workers.

1. We Owe Hard Work

Ecclesiastes 9:10:

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the realm of the dead, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.

Ecclesiastes 10:18:

Through laziness, the rafters sag; because of idle hands, the house leaks.

Matthew 25:26:

His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed?

2 Thessalonians 3:10:

For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat."

As Christ-followers, our work habits should be noticeably different from those who try to take advantage of the employer.

2. We Owe Protection of Employer's Assets

What are some of the employer assets that are commonly taken or used by employees without permission?

When a person takes something that is not rightfully his or hers without permission, using it for personal purposes, what do we call that action?

Exodus 20:15: You shall not steal.

3. We Owe Loyalty and Honesty

If you are loyal to someone, here are things you would NOT do:

- Talk about that person in a negative way behind his/her back.
- Listen to others talk about that person in a negative way.
- Laugh at jokes made at his/her expense.
- Complain and gripe about that person.
- Treat that person with any disrespect.

Ecclesiastes 10:20: Do not revile the king even in your thoughts, or curse the rich in your bedroom, because a bird in the sky may carry your words, and a bird on the wing may report what you say.

Whatever you say about your employer or a person in authority over you will get back to them—I promise you!

This principle holds true for anyone in authority over us.

What We Do NOT Owe an Employer

1. We Do Not Owe Dishonesty

When obeying an employer causes us to disobey a Christian principle, then our course of action is clear. We obey God rather than man.

2. We Do Not Owe Dishonorable Activity

What types of jobs are more likely to create environments that could encourage “dishonorable activity”?

Does that mean that a Christian should never take a job which has a reputation for dishonorable socialization? Why or why not?

Have you known someone - perhaps yourself - who was in this type of a job but was able to maintain a consistent Christian testimony and not take part in the dishonorable activities? If so, how did he/she do it?

3. We Do Not Owe All of Our Energy and Time

While it's true we owe them an honest day's work, if we give far more than that in order to get ahead, so that there's no time left for our families, our friends, our church or ourselves, then we're getting into dangerous spiritual territory.

One of the most effective ways you can witness on your job is to be the best worker there. You may not be the fastest worker or the smartest worker, but you can be the hardest worker.

Keep in mind, don't judge yourself by the poor work habits of others; judge yourself by what is right.

1 Timothy 4:12b: (BSB) Set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.

It's not always easy to do, but you'll be glad when you stand before God that you have given to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and given to God what belongs to God.

Dealing with Toxic People

Remember: God loves toxic people just as much as he loves you. And that toxic person is not in your life by accident.

Here are four practical things you can do to protect yourself when you're dealing with a truly toxic person.

1. *Don't let your thoughts and your mind dwell on them all the time.*

*Refuse to let them take over your mind. **Philippians 4** tells us to think about things that are lovely, pure, noble—and that pretty much excludes that toxic person. So, stop giving them time in your mind.*

2. *Distance yourself from them as much as possible.*

The Bible teaches us to set boundaries.

***Proverbs 4:14-15:** Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evildoers. Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn from it and go on your way.*

***Proverbs 16:17:** The highway of the upright avoids evil; those who guard their ways preserve their lives.*

You have to be wise about distancing yourself from people who would fill your mind with evil and try to bring you down emotionally. Learn to distance yourself mentally and emotionally.

3. *Seek relationships at work with uplifting people.*

Uplifting people are a great counterbalance to toxic people.

4. *Watch your self-talk.*

Don't be your own worst enemy by talking to yourself in discouraging ways. You can control what you say to yourself!

The good news is that as Christ-followers, we have the power to put these into practice, because we have been given God's Spirit, indwelling us and empowering us. And it begins, as so much does, by prayer.

In Philip Yancey's book, *Reaching for the Invisible God*, he advises that it is easier to act your way into feelings than to feel your way into actions!

Tell yourself frequently that workplaces will be workplaces. Drama, power struggles, and office politics are often inevitable, at least to some extent. Try to keep yourself as far removed from all this as possible.

Concentrate on your own work and excellence, and let the rest go!

Dealing with an Impossible Boss

Often when we're dealing with difficult people who are in authority over us, our reactions and confrontations with them are awkward, clumsy, inappropriate.

Pray about your impossible boss and ask God to give you his view of the whole situation.

Proverbs 25:15: (NASB) "By forbearance a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue breaks the bone."

Proverbs 16:21: (ESV) "The wise in heart will be called discerning, and sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness."

Discernment gives you the ability to know when to say what, to avoid some of those unprofitable confrontations. And persuasiveness means that the boss will listen and consider your ideas.

Don't wallow around in guilt over how you've handled it poorly in the past.

Conclusion

As you go out to face your relationships in the upcoming days, keep these "covenant" and "contractual" categories in mind. When you have decisions to make, ask yourself how it will affect your covenant relationships. Learn to screen your decisions through the priority of covenant above contractual relationships. I think you will find this a helpful tool in keeping an eternal perspective and not allowing the pressures of the moment to cause you to make poor decisions that will affect your covenant relationships negatively.



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